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SUBJECT: TAIWAN CLOSES MISSION AS MINSK SUPPORTS BEIJING

REF: A. 05 MINSK 956  
[1](#)B. 05 MINSK 1286

Classified By: Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Taiwan is closing its small trade mission in Belarus, as Minsk grows ever closer to Beijing. In recent months the mission has had no access to GOB officials, but has received requests for help from some in the opposition. The mission never succeeded in its main tasks, promoting political recognition for Taiwan or increasing bilateral trade. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On January 3, the Taiwanese government announced it would close its trade mission in Belarus, and relocate all functions to their office in Moscow. Taipei argued that Minsk had failed to support Taiwanese efforts to join the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Belarus, MFA responded that Minsk has a one-China policy, and its relations with Taipei would be guided by agreements Minsk signed with Beijing.

[1](#)3. (C) On January 10, Poloffs met over lunch with Chin Feng, First Secretary (and Head) of the Taipei Economic and Trade Mission in Minsk. Feng explained that Taipei decided to close its mission in Belarus, opened in 1996, because Minsk had not fulfilled its obligations under their bilateral agreement on relations, and because the GOB continues to grow closer to Beijing. Under the agreement, Feng claimed Minsk promised to open a mission in Taipei, which it never did. GOB rhetoric and actions also show Minsk is moving ever closer to Beijing, and away from Taiwan. Feng added that his government expects Lukashenko to be reelected in March, ensuring no change in GOB policy, and that Taipei decided to close the mission in advance of elections, to avoid any &madness8 Lukashenko might perpetrate during the election campaign. Closing this mission will save Taipei USD 500,000 a year. Feng will leave the country in February.

Little Contact or Trade

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[1](#)4. (C) Feng maintained that Taipei's Minsk mission was small, with three Taiwanese staff. Their main task was promoting bilateral trade, but they have had little success. In 2005 bilateral trade remained around USD 30 million, with Taiwan exporting mainly electronics and importing machinery and minerals. Feng stated there was no weapons trade between the two. In 2003 the trade mission brought a delegation of 44 companies to Belarus, which resulted in only USD 170,000 worth of contracts being signed. Taiwan also annually sent four Belarusian students to study on full government

scholarships (none of whom have ever returned to Belarus), and seven professionals on technical training. Feng was unsure if Taiwan,s Moscow office would keep these exchanges alive. Feng said he has had no contact with Belarusian officials in recent months, and starting last fall GOB officials began rejecting any gifts he tried to send. His mission was granted diplomatic status, but through the Ministry of Information, rather than the MFA.

Kozulin: Just Give me the Cash

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15. (C) Feng had limited contact with the Belarusian opposition. He said presidential hopeful and social-democratic leader Aleksandr Kozulin recently asked him for a 15-seat minibus, outfitted lavishly with high-tech communications gear. A few days later Kozulin changed his mind, and asked Feng to simply deposit the value of the bus into his bank account. Feng said he refused. Feng added that Taiwanese intelligence in Moscow received a report from the BKGB, via the FSB, that claimed Belarus, opposition lives luxuriously on western grants. Feng appeared to believe this report. Even so, Feng is considering donating his office,s equipment and furniture to those opposition politicians that he has met.

Growing Relationship between Minsk and Beijing

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16. (C) Feng stated that in recent months the GOB has been moving increasingly closer to Beijing. He estimated that nearly 1,000 Chinese students are studying in Belarus, and said military delegations travel between the two countries frequently. He stated his sources say Beijing and Belarus have signed a number of under the table trade deals for military equipment, but would not provide any details.

Comment

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17. (C) Minsk has clearly decided from whom it can gain more largesse in the battle between Beijing and Taipei, and has enthusiastically sided with China. During a December visit to Beijing, Lukashenko asserted that Taiwan has no right to be independent. In March, Belarus was among the first to announce it supported a new Chinese law that gave Beijing the legal right to use force against Taiwan if Taipei moves towards independence. In exchange, we understand Minsk is asking for concessionary investments, loans, and trade, although Beijing is having difficulty finding any objects of economic interest in Belarus, unreformed economy (reftels). In an incident reflecting the close ties between Belarus and China, the Latvian Ambassador in Minsk told us that after a Latvian minister visited Taipei, China &instructed8 Belarus to shift one day of shipments of Belarusian goods from Latvian to Estonian ports--an action that cost the Latvian port several million dollars.

Krol